

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1879.

SUNDAY, April 20th, 1879.—Queen Esther.—Esther iv. 10-17.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Verses 13-16.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass."—Psa. xxxvii. 5.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, Esther i. Tuesday, Esther ii. Wednesday, Esther iii. Thursday, Esther iv. Friday, Esther v, vi. Saturday, Esther vii, viii. Sunday, Esther ix, x.

LESSON OUTLINE.—I. Esther's fear. Vss. 10-12. II. A Creature of Providence. Vss. 13, 14. III. Her resolution. Vss. 15-17.

QUESTIONS.—Who was Esther? By whom brought up? To what place was she exalted? For what purpose? Who was Ahasuerus? When did he reign? Who was Haman? What dreadful plot did he devise? Who was Mordecai? How did he show his sorrow for the king's decree? What did he urge Esther to do?

I. Vss. 1-12.—Why was Esther afraid to heed Mordecai's words?

II. Vss. 13, 14.—In what danger was Esther in common with all Jews? How strong was Mordecai's assurance of deliverance from some source?

III. Vss. 15-17.—What did Esther do at once order? What became of Haman? What Scripture is verified by his history? Psalm vii. 15, 16. How was Mordecai honored? By what Jewish feast has this Jewish deliverance been celebrated from age to age? What is the meaning of Purim? Esther iii. 7; ix. 20-32.

ESTHER (Es-ter) was a beautiful Jewish maiden whose ancestor Kish (Esther ii. 5, 6) had been led into captivity. Of her own family history nothing further is known than that she was early an orphan and brought up by her cousin, Mordecai "the Jew." From this station she was exalted to be queen of Persia at the time of the king's dismissal of Vashti, though it was not until afterward that he knew of the race and ancestry of the person of his choice. Manners of the Persians, and the service for which Esther seems to have had this providential honor was the deliverance of her people and her kindred from a destruction that had been plotted against them by Haman the Agagite, the king's prime minister. From the account that is left of her, Esther appears to have been a woman of piety and patriotism combined with resolution, obtaining favor by her grace and beauty in the sight of all who looked upon her. Esther ii. 15.

THE BOOK OF ESTHER.—Prof. Stuart says very truly that "the feast of Purim that has come down to us from time immemorial proves as certainly that the main events related in the book of Esther happened, as the Declaration of Independence and the celebration of the Fourth of July prove that we separated from Great Britain and became an independent nation."

Ahasuerus, the Persian king, was probably the weak and headstrong Xerxes, who built the bridge over the Hellespont, whose reign began a. c. 486, and continued about twenty years. Displeased with Vashti, he married Esther in the seventh year of his reign, or a. c. 478 (Esther ii. 16), and, when duped by a wicked favorite, ordered the extermination of the Jews in the twelfth year of his reign, or a. c. 474.

Haman was the chief minister of Ahasuerus: Esther iii. 1. Josephus held him to be of Amalekite descent. Prideaux computes the sum that he was willing to pay into the Persian treasury for the execution of the Jews (Esth. iii. 9) as ten million dollars. But he fell into the net he had laid for others. Mordecai was one of the Captivity.

Recall some account of the Great Persian Empire, whose founder, Cyrus, allowed the Jews to return from captivity, as we saw in the first lesson of the year; one of the great Persian kings chose as queen the Jewish maiden, Esther, one of the Jews who had remained in the East. Service rendered the king by her uncle Mordecai (ii. 21-23). The king's favorite, Haman. Weak despots usually controlled by cunning favorites. Haman's anger with Mordecai, and determination to destroy his whole people (iii. 1-6). How he got

the king's consent (iii. 8-15). Mordecai's distress (iv. 1-3); he makes the matter known to Queen Esther (iv. 4-7), and urges that she shall intercede with the king for her people. (Tell this interesting story, or draw it out of the class by questions).

Now comes the lesson—having three stages; vs. 10-12; vs. 13, 14; vs. 15-17; and a fourth ought to be added (v. 1-3). The rule of the court (vs. 11) was to prevent the intrusion of disagreeable suppliants, and possible assassins.

EXPOSITION.—The lesson presents to us Esther's Fear; Esther's Alternative; and Esther's Resolve. The form of the presentation is in that of messages passing between Queen Esther and her cousin and foster-father Mordecai—two messages from her to him, and one intermediate from him to her.

I. Esther's Fear. Verses 10-12.

Verse 10.—Again Esther, etc.—She had begun the communication by sending her servant Hatach to Mordecai (vs. 5), and he had taken once before a message from her to him, and from him to her (vs. 6-9). To give "commandment unto Mordecai," was to command him to convey the message entrusted to him given in vs. 11.

Verse 11.—All the king's servants, and the people of the king's provinces, etc.—Mordecai's "charge" to Esther (vs. 8) required her to break (1) a law of the empire; (2) a law universally known, and hence more sure to be executed; (3) a law whose penalty was certain and immediate death, unless the golden sceptre should be raised by the capricious monarch in token of his favor, "which was life;" (4) a law whose transgression she had special reason to believe would not be forgiven her, as she had not had a token of royal favor for a month. This power of life and death, this absolute and arbitrary power belonged to the monarchs of this and other empires, and is often remarked by other than the inspired writers. Possibly the influence of Haman was used to her prejudice already, and that, if so, the king's thirty days' neglect to her, evidence that Haman's influence was even now succeeding.

II. Esther's Alternative. Verses 13, 14.

Verse 13.—Think not, etc.—From the words of prediction in the next verse it seems probable that Mordecai spake as a prophet and with divine authority. If this were the case, and Esther so understood it, Mordecai's words would have greatly increased weight on her mind. They would come as God's direct and special message to her—with a binding, constraining power. Mordecai knew, even without a revelation, that he himself, Esther's foster-father, was the sole and whole offence to Haman, and that Haman's malice and power would have for their victims every one related to Mordecai.

Verse 14.—For if thou altogether holdest thy peace, etc.—Literally, "if thou being silent, art silent," that is, if instead of speaking to the king as requested, she kept the matter closely concealed, and made no effort for her people. She had shown her disposition to be thus silent because of the peril of speech. Mordecai now assures her of the consequences. (1) Deliverance to the Jews from another quarter. (2) Certain destruction to herself and the extinction of her father's house. (3) The possible, nay, as the words rather imply, the certain success of her endeavor, and its consequent honor to her as well as blessing to her people. From what quarter Mordecai expected deliverance, whether he had any knowledge whence or what would be the deliverance, does not appear, but a prophetic assurance that from some quarter it would come—that clearly was his, and he would make it hers. The question, "Who knoweth whether thou, etc., are to show to Esther not only her grand opportunity, but also her providential designation and preparation for just this opportunity and its work, and hence God's will that she bravely answer its call. Blessed is he who knows his opportunity to do good, and has also the heart and will to improve it.

III. Esther's Resolution. Verses 15-17.

Verse 15.—Go gather together all the Jews, etc.—This answer shows that Mordecai's words had their designed effect: Irresolution was at an end. The peril was not less clearly seen or less keenly felt, but patriotism, piety, faith in God,

had mastered fear, and banished hesitation. That her victory was that of faith in God, and not mere confidence in her charms, is shown (1) by her request that the Jews of the capital intercede three days for her, and (2) by her promise that she too, and her maidens, would spend the same days in fasting and prayer. She here recognizes the fact that the hearts even of wicked men are subject to Divine control, and that prayer is effectual in securing results. The words of her resolve, "If I perish, I perish," are those of noble self-sacrifice. This language is sometimes used of the sinner's approach to God in Christ, but in that approach is no place for the thought of perishing. There is only salvation—thither is the perishing invited.

God's name is not mentioned in all the "Book of Esther," nor was it needful. God's name is not written in the heavens; and yet, "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge."

The Lord raised up Moses, Joshua, Samson, Esther, Cyrus—just at the crisis of destiny. He always has ready for the emergency some one who "comes to the kingdom" just in time.

She never forgot the guide of her youth—her uncle and adopted father; for it is beautifully said of her, that she "did" the commandment of Mordecai, like as when she was brought up with him."

She had the very spirit of Moses, when he was ready to sacrifice himself (Exodus xxxii. 32); of Paul, when he said, "I could wish myself accursed from Christ, for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh"; of Nehemiah, cup-bearer to the king in that same Shushan—whose heart was breaking, even in the sunshine of royal favor, over the afflictions of his people.

—Abridged from the Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, April 27th, 1879.—The Coming Saviour.—Isaiah xlii. 1-10.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."—Matt. iii. 17.

For the Teacher of the Primary Class.

Bring out in bold relief such points as are necessary to the application of the lesson, passing lightly over others. By all means connect it with the history of the Jews in Ezra's time which they have already studied.

Tell enough of the customs of the country to explain why Mordecai could neither come in to the king, nor she go out to him. Also of the law, which made Esther so much afraid to go in to the king.

Tell how she called a meeting for fasting and prayer outside of the palace, while she and her maids fasted and prayed within. That is what the first part of the Golden Text means, "Commit thy way unto the Lord." This means to do just what Esther did, to tell the Lord about our troubles, and ask him what we shall do, and he will be sure to show us.

Describe Esther in her royal robes on the third day, going bravely before the king. She was almost afraid to look; but see the golden sceptre, or rod, which was the sign of power, was held kindly out, and Esther might come! Who had turned the king's heart?

The story of the deliverance may be briefly told, but be sure to leave time for the personal application.

Who is our King? Must we wait before we can go in to him? Will he call us? What are some of the ways in which he calls us? How often may we go to him? Suppose we don't go, what then? Then we shall surely perish. Suppose we do go, and beg him to save us and our friends, will he turn us away? Never; he never yet cast out any who came to him.

The king granted Esther's request because he loved her. But how much more does God love his Son; and will he not give him what he asks?

Answer to Scripture Enigma

No. 14. MARY—RUTH.

- 1. M ange r.....Luke ii. 7.
2. A bih u.....Num. iii. 4.
3. R aimes t.....Matt. vi. 29.
4. A shoret h.....1 Kings xi. 33.

No. 15.

- ADAM—EDEN. Gen. 3.
1. A dyocat t.....1 John ii. 1.
2. D avi d.....Matt. i. 1-17.
3. A postl e.....Luke vi. 13.
4. M a n.....Phil. ii. 7-9.

[This was, by mistake, given two or three weeks ago as the answer to No. 12.]

Scripture Enigma.

No. 16.

- 1. What was by Christ to the apostle given, That he might show to men the way to heaven?
2. A stone, which holy Samuel did raise For a great victory gained, his God to praise.
3. A fruitful land from whence, in time of drought, Supplies of corn to neighbouring realms were brought.
4. Were did the Lord destroy the Egyptians' pride, And did for Israel's sake the sea divide?
5. Where dwelt the pleader for King David's son, Who from his lips a gracious pardon won?
6. What city was an emblem of our Lord, And to the wretched safety did afford?
7. Where did young David his first victory gain— The spot where Israel's mighty foe was slain?
8. Where did rebellious man erect a tower, That he might thus defy Almighty power?
9. Who was the first of all of human birth To quit for heavenly joys this sinful earth?
10. What nation carried Judah's sons away, And o'er the world bore universal sway?
11. What impious prince the God of heaven defied, And the same night in solemn judgment died?
12. Whoon God's altar burned unhallowed fire, And fell a victim to the Almighty's ire?
13. A beauteous city built in desert lone, Its ruins still to travellers are shown.
14. Whom did his gracious God Himself defend, And for his rescue did from heaven descend?

A mercy by our heavenly Father given, To aid us on our pilgrimage to heaven. Oh! may we this divine command obey, And never from God's holy precepts stray; But trust its glorious antitype to spend In peace, and love, and joy, which never end.

Select Serial.

Ponape; or, Light on a Dark Shore.

BY MRS. HELEN S. THOMPSON.

CHAPTER XIV.—Fleda's Faith.

"Fleda," asked Hattie, one morning, as she stood over her sister, brushing and braiding the long golden hair of the now fast fading girl, "tell me, dear, if you have one unreconciled thought in regard to our leaving you. You are so uncomplaining and patient that I sometimes think we do not know all you feel about it. I cannot endure to add one pang of sorrow to your overcharged heart. Do I? Do you feel as if my place was here while we may keep you with us, darling? Speak, Fleda, do," she continued, eagerly, as the fair face of the sick girl broke up into waves of feeling.

"Hattie," replied Fleda, "when I read of Mr. Coan's wonderful work on the Sandwich Islands—how he and one other missionary and their wives have taught and led to Christ more than eleven thousand persons—I feel but one pang at giving up another, and my last sister to such a life-work—"

"And that?" interrupted Hattie.

"Because God has not given me life and strength to do likewise. No, dear sister, I would not stand in your way for worlds, but bless God for giving you and John to each other with willing hearts for such a service. The separation will not be long. I expect to be very near you, dear."

Hattie started in surprise, but the full meaning of her sister's words did not occur to her until days after. Then it did, and with yet deeper force, when leagues of deep blue sea lay between her and her native land—that heaven and Fleda were "very near."

Clasped in each other's arms, heart to heart and hand in hand, these two were cementing their love for eternity, defying the walls of separation, even death itself.

In the library a very different scene was enacted. It was between John and Marion. The poor blind girl, now doubly blind, was pacing the wide room with an excited tread. Her brother, pale and anxious, sat watching her, occasionally joining in her walk, or vainly striving to draw her to a seat beside him, Marion now shaking off his arm with wild impatience, or anon sinking upon his breast in an agony of

tears, while John strove to reason with that invincible spirit.

"Lay yourself like a child in God's arms, Marion. Cease to contend with him on account of his past dealings with you or your loved ones, or because of your present trial. This terrible blindness may be but the dawn of eternal day to you, my child, my sister, my poor, poor Marion! Would God I could save you!" cried John, with streaming eyes.

"Ah! but you had rather save the Japanese. No! I shall be lost, while you sit in that fine white heaven of yours—all because you are a missionary, I suppose," cruelly answered the infatuated girl.

"Marion, child, you know not what you are saying: never dare to utter such words again! Be still!"

Overawed by his pained, stern voice, Marion was still, while Mr. Saybrook continued; "Answer me once for all: will you go with us and let me give you a brother's care, or take the fund which I shall leave for your comfort and stay with Mother Hammond? Think before you speak, that it may be final."

"I will stay," was the simple answer, but its tone was confident. John then laid her down upon the sofa, and fervently kissing brow and lips, rushed out of doors. Alone with God and in the sunshine, he could best throw off the pain his sister's words had caused, while she, left to her better self and silence, wept sore for the brother wounded and for herself at war with God.

After tea John had writing to occupy his attention; lamps were lighted in the boudoir off from Fleda's room, and the sisters, with Marion, had just laid out their evening reading, when Mrs. Hammond entered the apartment with an open paper, saying, "Children—here is John's last plea for missions, fresh from the press. Shall I read it aloud?"

"Do, do!" replied a chorus of voices, Hattie meanwhile placing an easy chair and ottoman near the shaded lamp that she might take her old place at mother's knee. Ah! those tender, electric currents running from hand to brow as mother and child read and listened! You can tell who have pillowed a fair head on your lap while loving fingers gave their last fond touches.

"Why we go to Japan," was the title, and John's clear head had put the reasons strongly; every word was directly to the point.

Before Mrs. Hammond had finished reading, John entered the room, sitting quietly by until the close of the article, then said, with a touch of bitterness in his voice, "Mother, aside from you, I cannot point to the friend who says, 'You are right; go ahead, and God speed you.' It does seem hard sometimes, when one needs a little encouragement to carry out his strongest convictions of duty. One would suppose, to judge from what is said to me, that I had no love of country, family ties, or secret ambitions to contend with, like other men."

There was a slight quiver in Mr. Saybrook's voice, which caused the little group to look up with some astonishment, as he seldom spoke of his emotional life. Fleda's voice summoned him from the inner room, John crossed the library with a weary step and sat down by her couch. "What is it, little sister?" he asked, brightening, as did every one who came within the radius of Fleda's smile and eye.

"A stout heart to a stiff brea,' brother I remember reading of a reformer who was told, 'The whole world is against you.' 'Then I am against the world,' was the reply. That was grand. You know it all without my telling you, dear brother, but I have been thinking ever since you spoke so sadly of One greater than all, who said, 'Be ye not troubled when men shall speak all manner of evil of you for my name's sake.' What wondrous evidence of his love and favor he has given you, dear John! Your life hitherto is full of proofs of his leading. Is it not enough to follow when he leads, John? Some one has said, 'Human life is a prophetic literature.' Ah, then, what a prophecy is yours! I read now dimly, imperfectly, but confidently, its foreshadowment; but its fulfillment you and I and all these dear ones, with multitudes of those who shall exultingly cry, 'Thine the hand that led us here, shall see and know together under the tree of life.'"

Fleda sank back exhausted, while the tears, happy tears, suffused John's eyes. Was she inspired? John thought so as he bent to kiss her "good-night," and with feeble breath she whispered, "Stand fast, therefore." "Be of good comfort."